

Unity Through the Gospel

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Preacher: Clarence Rolle

[0 : 00] Good morning.

Good morning. Thank you, Demetri. I think she's such a lovely teacher. Don't you think she's lovely? All right. I always look forward to verses remember, especially when she's doing it. I have to admit, I'm not good with time travel, right? On this particular Sunday, I consider time travel because somehow I get transported an hour ahead.

And it's amazing. I didn't realize that when I volunteered to bring the message today, right? So I think God was being gracious to all of us and keeping me ignorant of that until just this week, just a few days ago.

But God uses some amazing means to do some things. And this morning, I mean, believe it or not, he used my wife for me to be somewhat on time today.

[1 : 25] God does work in mysterious ways, they say. It's miracles to perform. Okay. So, let's begin.

Brothers and sisters, what if I said to you that the white devil cannot be saved? The white devil cannot be saved.

I see some looks of alarm on some faces, and I can quite understand that. But I think that got your attention. And...

And they proclaim this message.

They believe that their particular race is the true Israel. And even more than that, they claim that the blessing of Israel is for their race and their race alone.

[3 : 10] Well, this morning's text makes it clear that that claim is not true. Instead, the text proclaims that God saves and unites the elect from all peoples through Christ.

And I hope that you will see that as we read the text for this morning. So, if you haven't done so, you can turn to Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 through 6.

Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1 through 6. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

[4 : 49] Let's pray. Father, we have come to a very weighty text, and I feel the weight of this passage.

Father, I pray that you would have your Holy Spirit do his work today. That your Spirit will be the teacher, will be the illuminator.

And we pray, Lord, that the truth of your word shines through and pierces our understanding and pierces our hearts. And may you move in power through your word, we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. This morning I've organized thoughts on this passage under three headings. They are the prisoner, the steward, the revelator.

The prisoner, the steward, and the revelator. These are three distinct roles that we see Paul playing.

[6 : 04] he identifies himself with these roles in the passage. And there are three roles that he is fulfilling through his ministry.

So first we see Paul as a prisoner. It's important to realize that these six verses are not given in isolation.

And that's why we have these sermon series, right? So that we can see the full context of the scriptures. And the first phrase of the chapter is very clear.

It indicates that this is connected to what we have seen already. Paul links what he is saying in this chapter to what he said in chapter 2. So we must link what he is saying here to the previous chapter and to all that you can recall from last week that we heard.

He begins with, for this reason. So Paul is saying, I'm going to make a statement now. And the statement I'm making, I'm making it because something that I said already is true.

[7 : 17] He points us back to Ephesians 2 where he explained that Gentiles, those who are not Jews, were separated from God.

They were far off from God before the work of Christ. There was hostility between God and the Gentiles, but not just between them.

But there was also hostility between God's people, the Jews, and the Gentiles. But then Christ came. And we heard last week how Christ's sacrifice destroyed this division between Jew and Gentile, and the ordinances that were formally required to ceremonially separate the Jews from non-Jews were done away with.

And now we had this joining, this coming together of all believers with no distinction or separation. Instead of being seen as two different groups, we are now, in every spiritual way, one group, one building, one body.

[8 : 33] So this is a profound truth that Paul understood, and it was a radical shift in the structure of things that were previously known to and practiced by faithful Jews.

So, Jewish people and non-Jewish people who were believers needed to be instructed in this. And they needed to be taught how to walk through this.

So this is what Paul had been called to. And we know that Paul had a special ministry to the Jews with a special emphasis on ministering to the Gentiles.

And God himself says this. From the very day that Christ called Paul to himself, God made Paul's special mission known.

So we know the story of how Paul was persecuting the church. He was beating, imprisoning, even having the believers killed.

[9 : 39] And he was on his way to Damascus when the Lord Jesus appeared to him. There's no one zealous like Paul in Orthodox Jewish practices.

So he's on his way to Damascus. Christ appears to him. He's left blind. And then Christ appears to a believer, Ananias, and tells Ananias to go and minister to Paul.

And this is how that conversation went. If you look at Acts 9, verses 13 to 15. But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man.

How much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.

But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

[10 : 57] So Paul had a reputation. In this country, they have a term that the police often uses, saying this person is known to the police. Well, that's not a good label to have, if you're not familiar with it.

So in this context, Paul was known to the believers. He was a terror to them. And here we see God saying to Ananias, Go, he is my chosen instrument, not only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles.

So from the beginning, God made it clear that Paul had a special ministry of reconciliation. He would teach how Jew and Gentile are united.

They're reconciled to God and to each other in Christ. So his ministry would show how God is the God of both the Jewish and Gentile believer.

Now, because he was called to a special ministry to the Gentiles, Paul had no choice in the matter.

[12 : 10] This was the assignment that God had given to him. So Paul says in verse 1 of Ephesians 3, I am a prisoner. And he's a prisoner to this calling, to the ministry, and to the message.

And the prisoner in most situations, as we all know, has no say in how they live. They're told when to wake up, when to have meals, when to have baths.

They're bound to live a certain way. And that's what Paul is saying. He was bound to this doctrine of unity, unity of the believers.

And he was faithful to it. He was so faithful that he was willing to die for the calling of God placed on his life. And in this case, he is willing to be imprisoned for it.

Because here we can see a double meaning in what Paul is saying about being a prisoner. Although Paul is surely referring to his imprisonment, to his calling, at this time he is actually, literally, a prisoner of Rome as well.

[13:28] So the time that he was writing this letter, he was a prisoner bound to Rome. In Acts 21, we see the circumstances on which Paul was imprisoned.

Because he was quite literally imprisoned, as he says, on behalf of these Gentiles. This is why he ended up in the hands of Rome.

So in Acts 21, we see that Paul had just completed three missionary journeys, and he had returned to Jerusalem.

And the Jews had heard how he was teaching that they could do away with these traditions that they had. They heard how he did not insist that Gentiles had to observe these ceremonial traditions. They could not observe certain days. They could not eat kosher food. It was just upside down, totally not the Jewish way of life that they insisted brought salvation.

[15:04] And Paul was seemingly very close to the Gentiles who these Jews despised, and they hated Paul for that. They hated him enough to kill him.

And so they tried to kill him. So in Acts 21, the Jews, they seized Paul. They tried to kill him. he was rescued by Roman soldiers and ended up in prison, a prisoner of Rome for four years as Rome tried to sort out the charges against him.

But in the moment of writing this letter, he doesn't refer to the discomfort of being a prisoner of Rome or the anxiety that comes with being a prisoner of the greatest force that Earth knew at that time.

Instead, he chooses to refer to the privilege of being a prisoner to the awesome calling of heaven. And that should instruct us. Like Paul, we ought to see the privilege and the pleasure of being a prisoner to God's calling. And we ought to accept whatever work God has called us to do.

[16:21] next, we consider the steward. In verse 2, Paul refers to himself as a steward of God's grace for the Gentiles.

So the steward is someone who manages something for the owner of that thing. He's a custodian. Something is put in his care and so Paul is explaining that he has been made a custodian of God's grace to the Gentile believers.

And we know that grace is God's unmerited favor. It is what he gives although we don't deserve it. So Paul is saying that he has been appointed as a means of imparting God's favor to the Gentiles. Paul has been divinely appointed to be an instrument that God is using to deliver the blessings of redemption to the Gentiles.

So you can see how this is linked to his role as a prisoner as we discussed earlier. So this is not a small task. It's not a trifling thing. It's not something that Paul can walk away from.

[17:40] He is walking through and living out a sacred calling to the benefit of the Gentiles. And if we look at Paul's calling to minister to the Gentiles we can see that this calling is directly from Christ.

We see how Christ himself had called Paul and Christ told Ananias in a vision that Paul would minister to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

But if we look at how that ministry was activated how it flowed we can see that dramatic calling from Christ in Acts 9 and then we see the calling was confirmed by the Holy Spirit in Acts 13.

Paul was at the church of Antioch with other prophets and teachers and this is what we read in Acts 13. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them all. So we see the Holy Spirit confirming Paul's ministry.

[19:10] And in verse 4 we see that they relied on the Holy Spirit even to show them which way to go. First to Seleucia and then to Cyprus. So Paul's ministry of being a steward was a divine one.

It was divinely led. And we see other signs of that in the way that God directed Paul's life. One of the things that sticks out to me in this chapter Acts 13 is how this is the last time we see Paul referred to as Saul.

Paul is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Saul. So you could say it's the Gentile form of that name. So Paul's entire identity becomes wrapped up in his gospel ministry to the Gentiles. his identity becomes engrossed in this stewardship. It's not something that he creates for himself. It's God's doing.

And we see him in obedience to God meeting out this grace to the Ephesians. God's God's grace. So part of that grace is seen in our next point and it's our final point that Paul was given a revelation that profoundly affected Jews and Gentiles and how they related to each other.

[20 : 47] Paul hopes that the Ephesians have heard about his stewardship for them. And part of that stewardship was that he was entrusted with this revelation which was the mystery of Christ.

Now if you have heard sermons in this church for any length of time, without a doubt at some point you've heard Pastor Moss say that a mystery is something that was hidden in the past in Old Testament times but later in New Testament times, the full meaning of it is made known.

So in this passage we actually see Paul give that definition. He says in verse 5, this mystery was not known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

So there we see the mystery defined in Scripture. And Paul goes on to reveal this specific mystery and it's in three parts.

First, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, that the Gentiles are members of the same body, and that the Gentiles are partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel.

[22 : 16] the Gentiles are fellow heirs, the Gentiles are members of the same body, and the Gentiles are partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel.

So Paul labels all these the mystery of Christ. And he does that because they are all accomplished in Christ.

Paul proclaims that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, meaning that the kingdom of God belongs as much to the Gentile believers as it does to the Jews who believe in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 1 declares that Christ is heir to all things. Let me see Paul say in Romans 8 that believers are fellow heirs with Christ.

So we share in the kingdom of God. So let's quickly look at Romans 8 verses 15 to 17.

[23 : 29] It will be projected for you. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

So we're heirs with Christ because we are also sons of God. And that's how it works, right? children inherit from their father.

So children expect to inherit from their father. We have been adopted into the family of God to share in the inheritance. inheritance. And notice that it is the Holy Spirit that makes this possible. Our receiving the Holy Spirit is part of our inheritance. And it confirms that we share in God's kingdom.

[25 : 03] And as we go through this, you will recall that this is also explained in Ephesians 1, where God is saying that everything that Christ, everything is being united in Christ.

Jew and Gentile, things on earth, things in heaven. And Paul makes that point even from chapter 1, that the Spirit is at work in this.

So this equality between Jew and Gentile was a point on which the Jews stumbled because they could not see Gentiles as their equals.

As we heard last week, they looked on Gentiles with contempt. They could not see themselves as sons of God. They could see themselves as sons of God, but not the Gentile, not the non-Jew.

And it was because they did not understand the mystery of Christ. Gentiles. So last week we looked at Genesis chapter 12.

[26 : 12] And I want to look at that again briefly. Because in order to get a very good understanding of this mystery of Christ, and to see how Christ unites Jews and Gentiles, we have to take a quick look at a couple scriptures in Genesis.

So let's consider when God first called Abram, and he was creating the nation of Israel. Genesis 12, 1 through 3.

Now the Lord said to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

So the Jew, they easily latched on to verse 2. God would make a great nation of Abram. That sounded good to them.

[27 : 29] there was a lot of pride in that. They would be a part of a great nation. But they did not have a full appreciation of the ending part of verse 3.

And in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. God promised. So if there is a blessing promise for all the families of the earth, then this could not be limited only to Jews because there are families in the earth that are not Jewish.

They are outside of Israel. Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, as God had commanded him.

And of course, God stops him before he gets to sacrifice Isaac. And God explains that he had just put him through a test. And this is what God says to Abraham.

I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore.

[28 : 53] And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemy. And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

Now I want you to pay particular attention to the offspring in verse 18 because it's a peculiar offspring.

Before that in verse 17 we see offspring and it's plural. There are many of them, as many as the stars in the heavens.

but in verse 18 the offspring is singular. And that's because it refers only to Christ.

And your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. God is revealing here that people throughout the world will be able to come to Christ, be able to be sons of God because of Christ.

[30 : 10] God was showing us that just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son, God would be willing to do the same thing. He would send his son Christ to be a lamb that would pay the penalty for our sins, to break down the divisions between us and him, to break down the divisions between Jew and Gentile, and reconcile us all to each other.

And this is how all the families and all the nations of the earth would be blessed. It's what God had promised in Genesis 12 and Genesis 15, now Genesis 22.

And brothers and sisters, that is the gospel. God was literally proclaiming the gospel to Abraham, even at that time. But it was not fully understood until the fullness of time when God by his Holy Spirit revealed it to his prophets and apostles and threw them to us.

So God made us all heirs through Christ. Whether we are believing Jew or believing Gentile, he has united us in one body.

It's not a Jewish body, it's not a Gentile body, it's the body of Christ, the church, the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

[31 : 58] And in this way, through Christ, we are all partakers in this promise God made. God called Abraham with a promise to bless all nations through him.

More than 400 years later, God gave the Jewish people the law and ceremonial ordinances to distinguish them from all other people.

But God always intended that he would have a spiritual people for himself that would be drawn from all people of the earth. And he would do that through Christ.

Through his suffering, death, and resurrection, paid for our sins, and made a way for us to be saved by faith in him alone.

And not through our works. And Paul sums this up so well, I couldn't say it bad on him, so I'm going to say it how he says it in Galatians 23-29.

[33 : 22] This is what's written, actually even before this letter to the Ephesians, Paul had already written this. Galatians 23, Galatians 3 verses 23-29.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

for in Christ Jesus we are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There's neither Jew nor Greek. There's neither slave nor free. There's no male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

[34 : 30] And if you are Christ then you are Abraham's offspring. Heirs according to the promise.

Well, listen, sisters, our identity is in Christ. Before we're Bahamian or American, Russian or Ukrainian, if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are known first by his name.

God has called us to be a people from every nation and tribe united with our citizenship that's really in heaven.

God is God so when we have people preaching that salvation is only for one race and not another that is directly opposed to the word of God.

It's a false gospel. The God of Abraham is God of all the earth and he saves the elect as he pleases from every nation, every tribe, every tongue, enlighten them in one body, the body of Christ.

[36 : 01] Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. Father, we thank you that the mystery has been made known.

We thank you, Lord, that you have shown that you are not making things up as you go along, that before the foundation of the world, you had us in mind.

You prepared a way for us and you proclaimed that way. proclaimed your gospel to Abraham. we thank you for the promise you gave.

We thank you, Lord, that you fulfilled the promise that you delivered Christ. Now, there's no more divisions in your people.

We thank you for the new man that you have created, a spiritual people to yourself. we pray that your spirit will move in your church, revealing to us to be reunited, that there are no divisions, and through us, you dwell with your people, and your name is praised to the earth.

[37 : 22] May your name be forever praised. Amen. Amen. I invite you to please stand as we prepare to sing a closing song.

Receive the glory. Amen. not to us, not to us, but to your name alone we long the glory, the glory forever.

For your faithfulness and steadfast love, receive the glory, the glory belong to you.

All that we've accomplished you have done for us, and any fruit we harvest is a gift from your hand.

We are only jars of clay that hold a priceless treasure, and we exist to bring you pleasure, O God.

[38 : 48] And not to us, but to your name alone, be all the glory, the glory forever.

for your faithfulness and steadfast love, receive the glory, the glory belongs to you.

And only by your mercy, only by your mercy can we come to you. glory, for your and we deserve your judgment, you have called us by name, so we glory in the cross of Christ that made us yours forever, that joined our lives together to save.

and not to us, but to your name alone, be all the glory, the glory forever.

For your faithfulness and steadfast love, receive the glory, the glory belongs to you.

[40 : 16] to us, but to your name alone, be all the glory, the glory forever.

And for your faithfulness and steadfast love, receive the glory, the glory belongs you.

the glory, the glory belongs to you.

Just take your seats for a moment, please. for this morning, we want to take a moment as we close in prayer.

We want to pray for Lori Mascher-Schmidt. Some of you have met Lori. Lori's been with us for the past two months or so. She has been guests of Tim and Ken Reese, and Lori's going to be flying out from the country in a couple of days.

[41 : 36] So, I want to pray for her, but Tim, would you mind just sharing just a couple of words that can help us as we pray for Lori this morning? Good morning.

About often October I would have met Lori and she came into our lives just like a normal person, just like meeting a new person.

Over the course of time, I began to learn that she was a believer in Christ, came from a very developed Christian family.

Naturally a bond started from that point and so she would become a part of it. I said to her last week, it's almost like, I feel it's just a part of our life, I can't explain it.

And it's obviously the bond is from the sense that we'll all believe it's in Christ. I personally believe that Lori has a special call in her life. I'm not quite sure what that is.

[42 : 46] So as she returns home, which will be next Monday, this will be a lot actually with us, but as she returns home next week Monday, we just want to make a special prayer for her.

She's become very inundated to Kimmy tonight. You would have seen her face. I, like her, was in an opposite position. I was actually in her home country in the early 2000s.

And just like her now, I stood out like I was the oddball in the room, so to speak. I look different than everybody else. I look different than everybody else.

And that's how it is with us. But the bond is that of one of Christ. That no matter what we look like, no matter where we come from, our love, our central values of faith, together as one in the family.

So we want to make a special prayer for Lori. Good morning. Thanks, Tim. Amen. And that is one of the joys of being a part of the Lord's family.

[43 : 53] Well, Lori, it's been a blessing to have you with us. I'm sure a number of you have met her. I pray you get to say goodbye to her as she leaves this morning. But I want to read five verses of scripture from Psalm chapter 20.

And I pray you'll remember these. The law will etch them in your heart. And the psalmist writes, May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble.

May the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May he send you help from the sanctuary. And give you support from Zion.

May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans.

May we shout for joy over your salvation. And in the name of our God, set up your banners. May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.

[45 : 00] And I pray after you, Lori, as you go this morning. So let's all stand. And I'm going to lead us. But would you just join me in prayer this morning as we pray for our sister Lori as she heads home.

Father, we are so grateful this morning that you have a big family. And Lord, as we have heard, we... Didn't choose you, but you chose us.

And Lord, we thank you that... That family that you have joined us to knows no divisions or distinctions.

It is one family in Christ. And Lord, we pray that Lori's time with us would have made that true in her experience here. Would you go before her, Lord, as she travels.

We pray that there would be a sense in her heart that you are ordering her steps and she is not alone. We pray, O Lord, that as she returns home, that you would unite her with those of like precious faith.

[46 : 15] And Lord, we ask that each step of the way as she makes decisions, that she will hear your voice saying to her, this is the way. And Father, we pray that those who would be surrounding her will be God sent.

They would be gifts from your hands and Lori would recognize them as such. So, Lord, would you go with us to now and be with her, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Amen. Brother Clines, thank you so much for serving us with God's word this morning. Very clear sermon and profitable to our souls to see the amazing work of God in joining peoples of many nations and races into one big family.

Where our distinctions of race and sex and nationality and ethnicity, they mean nothing in Christ. We don't lose them when we come to Christ, but they are of no value beyond, as Clines said, we are first those who belong to Christ.

So, brother, thank you so much for serving us. Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you now that as we leave, we leave in your presence and goodness.

[47 : 44] We pray that the word that we heard today will truly link in our hearts. Lord, help us to embrace all those who name the name of Christ, even though they may be different from us in aesthetics.

But, oh Lord, our hearts are all redeemed by you and we belong to you through Jesus Christ. And so, may we claim all those as brothers and sisters who claim you as their father.

And now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever.

In Christ's name, amen. Amen. God bless you. You're dismissed. Thanks for being here this morning. If you need prayer as the others leave, please come. It'll be our joy to pray with you. Father, come reveal your love that you've found.